ED 021 833 TE 000 481

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EASY AS 1, 2, 3, (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9...)
Pub Date Oct 67
Note: 3p.
Available from: Media and Methods Institute, Inc., 134 N. 13th St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19107 (Subscription: $3.00 per year. Single copy $0.40)
Journal Cit: The Teachers Guide to Media and Methods; v4 n2 p15-6 Oct 1967
EDRS Price MF: $0.25 HC: $0.20
Descriptors: *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *FILM PRODUCTION, *FILMS, MASS MEDIA, SECONDARY EDUCATION, SOUND FILMS, *TEACHING METHODS

A course in movie making should begin with a detailed explanation and demonstration of the camera, with emphasis on caring for the equipment. Students should start by shooting stationary objects: practicing close-up, medium, and long shots of varying length. It is particularly important to get students' films processed quickly so that a critique can be conducted as soon as possible. When students begin to work on their first films, they should submit scenarios of their ideas for approval, and should prepare detailed shooting scripts and a story board which describes the visual and aural contents of each shot. The instructor should indicate to the students that their scripts are guides from which they may de[illegible] if their intuition dictates. Finally, he should guide students in the editing and narrating of their films, for much of what makes films successful comes from hard creative work after the film itself has been shot. (DL)

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media AND METHODS

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The Teachers Guide to MEDIA & METHODS (formerly SCHOOL PAPERBACK JOURNAL) is published nine times per year September through May by Media & Methods Institute, Inc., 134 N. 13th St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19107. Phone: (215) 564-5170. Subscription: $3 per year, $4 in Canada, $2 each for 20 or more to one school address. Single copy 40¢. © Copyright, Media & Methods Institute, Inc., 1967. Printed in U.S.A. by World Color Press. Controlled circulation postage paid at Sparta, Illinois.

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Easy as 1,2,3,(4,5,6,7,8,9...)

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by Rodney E. Sheratsky

IN THE BOX with the Kodak M14 Movie Camera for Super 8 Movies is an instruction booklet. In the booklet is an article, INSTAMATIC *Super 8 Movies Are As Easy as 1,2,3.* These are the easy steps:

1. *After installing batteries, open the camera door and drop in a Super 8 cartridge.*
2. *Look through the viewfinder and aim the camera at the subject.*
3. *Press the exposure release; you are making movies.*

The last step is the most deceptive, for it is dangerously encouraging. Making movies—that is, those movies made by directors who have a fresh vision and an unusual way of seeing—is extremely difficult. However obvious that observation is, it is true.

With the cost of film hardware now within the reach of many students' allowances, more will be buying and using easy-to-load and operate Super 8's. The technology has been simplified and yet the actual creative process is as difficult as ever. Making movies is *not* as "easy as 1,2,3."

Hence the first tip: *Even before students receive their cameras, remove the instruction booklets.* If the students have purchased their own cameras, advise them not to read the pages in the instruction booklet, or if they read them, not to heed them.

2. *Explain and demonstrate each part of the camera and the importance of caring for the camera and equipment.* At this point, the teacher can explain the instructions in the booklets which accompany apparatus. This is the least glamorous phase of movie making. Yet, students need to understand how careful (rather than slipshod) use of equipment will avoid later frustrations. Some students will become impatient with you for encouraging them to respect their instruments. For such students, only overexposed, underexposed, and blurred images are better teachers.

3. For the first exercises[1], ask students to shoot a stationary object—a tree, building, or statue—from as many angles as possible. The point is to make the object "move." This is the chance for students to try some of the techniques they have been taught to look for while viewing professionally made films during previous class sessions. As they try close-up, medium, or long shots, students can vary their length. They can try wipes (by moving a dark paper slowly across the lens). They can try tracking and trucking. They can try the zoom shot if their cameras are so equipped. If their cameras—such as the Kodak M14—do not come with zooms, fine. The time saved by not using such gadgets can be used by studying the limitations of their cameras and using them to imaginative advantage .

4. *After the film exercises have been shot, try to have them developed as quickly as possible.* When handled by a local camera shop, this process can take from five to seven days. This period is much too long.

For faster service, ask your camera shop to give you authorization papers to submit to your nearest processing plant. Deliver these papers and films to the plant (assuming it's within reasonable travel distance) where films are generally processed within 24-48 hours. For this service, there is a special charge of 50 cents. It's worth it, for students should see their films as soon as possible.

5. *When you screen these films, conduct critiques about the (in)effectiveness of their shots and composition.* This is the time to review the

1. This exercise should be offered after students have made still photographs and studied the techniques of composition and lighting. The photographs in such books as James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (photographed by Walker Evans), B. Abbott's *The World of Eugene Atget*, and the Museum of Modern Art's *Dorothea Lange* are perfect for this purpose.

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techniques taught earlier. During the first screening, students will be pleased with the results, especially if this is the first time they've used a camera. For the first screening, let students bask in their (undeserved) happiness. During the second screening, be firm—though not damaging—in citing all the films' faults. Rewarding the slipshod with a commendation is dishonest. Assuming that the students are in your class because they want to make films worthy of their respect as well as yours, they'll bounce back after severe criticism.

6. *When the students are ready to make their first films, ask them to submit scenarios based upon ideas they have suggested.* Even if their ideas are trite, go along with them, yet try to encourage students to think of new ways of treating these ideas.

(Incidentally, dull and unimaginative students will make dull and unimaginative films. Made at a time when we're told every person can be creative, that statement is heresy. But students with a paucity of experience, sheltered backgrounds, limited intelligence, and no zest for life cannot be expected to make any films but those which reveal these deficiencies in their personal and intellectual lives. True, you can encourage and advise such students. But you must remember that if the film is the student's, the student—not you—must make it.)

7. *After the scenario has been approved, ask the students to prepare detailed shooting scripts.* Duplicate copies for all members in the class so that all might analyze them and suggest ways in which certain shots or scenes could be more effectively made.

8. *Before students begin shooting, ask them to prepare a story board on a series of index cards.* On each card, the student describes the shot as well as its visual and aural contents. These cards will be helpful when students edit their films, especially if they shot out of sequence. These cards will remind them of effects they originally wanted.

9. *Before students begin each day's shooting, remind them to check their batteries, clean their lenses, and make any necessary camera adjustments.*

10. *Remind students that their scripts are guides.* If a student has such remarkable powers of intuition that he can ignore details in the shooting script in favor of unplanned ideas, encourage him to ignore the script. Before he does, he should be thoroughly familiar with it. Then he can understand why thoughtless allegiance to the script will handicap him.

Some students might want to shoot first and write the script later. Be patient with such a student. Some years from now, he'll invite you to a screening of his film when it's shown at an "underground" film festival.

So much for the shooting. After the films have been developed, screen the rushes and be prepared for feelings of depression. Just when students are about to pitch their films into the basket, tell them all is not lost.With editing machines, they can save their films or make them appear better. Of course, an editor will not make a poorly shot film a good one, but it can at least omit the totally disastrous portions. Taped selective sound accompaniment will also help. (With 8mm film, it's almost impossible to have sound with synchronized lip movements, so it's wise to have off-screen narration and appropriate musical passages on tape.) To clarify a scene, your film maker might have to prepare narration with subtle comments so the audience gets the point. Admittedly, this is cheating. But to prevent a cinematic abortion, it's necessary to cheat by editing and taping to save the film and the student's face.

Weeks of filming, editing, and taping will convince students that Bernard Shaw was right when he commented that torture and the fine arts are the best teachers. Only the torture of shooting and re-shooting, editing and re-editing, taping and re-taping will convince students that these are the only ways artistically valid films are made from artistically valid ideas.